

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07
LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 USIA-06 AID-05 DODE-00
PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 IO-13 L-03 DHA-00 TRSE-00
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R 141800Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8446
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
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AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
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USEC
USOECN, ALSO FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, IT, US
SUBJECT: ITALIAN LABOR LEADER BENVENUTO HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE
AFTER VISIT TO US.

REF: ROME 17576 (NOTAL)

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED.

1. SUMMARY. SOCIALIST UIL SEC-GEN. BENVENUTO SPOKE ENTHUSIASTICALLY
ABOUT HIS OCTOBER 31 - NOVEMBER 6 VISIT TO THE US AND GENERALLY
POSITIVELY ABOUT US LABOR. HE EMPHASIZED THE NEED TO REESTABLISH
CLOSER RELATIONS WITH THE AFL-CIO, AND HOPED TO ENCOURAGE THE
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AFL-CIO TO REJOIN THE ICFTU. HE URGED MORE ACTIVE ITALIAN
PARTICIPATION IN THE ICFTU, ETUC AND TRADE SECRETARIATS, AND
SAID UIL WILL BEGIN AN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE BULLETIN TO CORRECT
NEGATIVE "MISINFORMATION" ABOUT ITALY AND ITS UNIONS HE
FOUND RAMPANT IN US INVESTMENT CIRCLES. HE HELD PRESS
CONFERENCE JOINTLY WITH LEADING UIL SOCIAL DEMOCRAT RAVECCA,
JUST BACK FROM A TRIP TO ISRAEL, WHO WILL REPRESENT UIL AT

ITALIAN-AMERICAN LABOR COUNCIL CONVENTION THIS WEEK. THEY ALSO ANNOUNCED UIL INITIATIVES ON CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND HUMAN RIGHTS. END SUMMARY.

2. ON NOVEMBER 10, GIORGIO BENVENUTO, SOCIALIST SECRETARY GENERAL OF UIL, ITALY'S THIRD MAJOR LABOR CONFEDERATION, AND LINO RAVECCA, A UIL NATIONAL SECRETARY AND LEADER OF UIL'S SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC CURRENT, HELD A HASTILY-CONVOKED PRESS CONFERENCE TO REPORT ON BENVENUTO'S JUST-COMPLETED U.S. VISIT (REFTEL). (RAVECCA HAD JUST RETURNED FROM VISITING ISRAEL.) BENVENUTO SAID HIS TRIP'S TWO OBJECTIVES WERE TO REESTABLISH RELATIONS WITH AMERICA'S LABOR MOVEMENT AND TO DISCUSS ITALY'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION, PARTICULARLY TO STIMULATE AMERICAN INVESTMENT IN ITALY.

3. SPEAKING OF HIS FIRST OBJECTIVE, BENVENUTO ALLUDED TO PAST "EPISODES OF INTERFERENCE WHICH OFTEN HELPED AGGRAVATE THE CONTRASTS AND DIVISIONS" IN ITALIAN LABOR AND WHICH "MOTIVATED THE ORIGIN OF THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH RECENTLY AROSE BETWEEN UIL AND AFL-CIO." (EVIDENTLY REFERRING TO HIS RUDE WITHDRAWAL OF UIL'S INVITATION TO THE AFL-CIO TO ATTEND UIL'S CONVENTION THIS JUNE) THIS HAD BEEN DISCUSSED AND CLARIFIED IN WASHINGTON AND NEW YORK TO WHAT HE BELIEVED WAS MUTUAL SATISFACTION, AND THE BASIS RECREATED FOR REESTABLISHMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP ON A NEW BASIS, "WHICH CANNOT BUT TAKE ACCOUNT" OF ITALIAN LABOR'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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"AUTONOMY AND MATURITY" AND "THE ROLE UIL'S LEADERSHIP GROUP PLAYS AND INTENDS TO CONTINUE TO PLAY."

4. AMERICAN LABOR IS MUCH MORE ALIVE, MILITANT AND COMPLEX THAN ITALIANS REALIZE, HE SAID. SECTORS SUCH AS TELEPHONE WORKERS AND "PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT" (EVIDENTLY AFSCME) ARE MUCH MORE "PROGRESSIVE" THAN HE HAD IMAGINED. "PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT", WHICH HAD A BLACK NUMBER TWO MAN, IS INDEED MUCH MORE PROGRESSIVE AND POLITICALLY-INVOLVED THAN PUBLIC EMPLOYEE UNIONS IN ITALY, HE ADDED, AND EVEN GOES SO FAR AS TO FAVOR THE CONCEPT OF SOCIALISM, GENERALLY TABOO IN AMERICA. GIVEN AMERICAN LABOR'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL CLOUT AND INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ITALY AND ITALIAN LABOR THAT AMERICAN LABOR NOT ISOLATE ITSELF AND, IN PARTICULAR, NOT TURN TO PROTECTIONISM, WHICH COULD SERIOUSLY DAMAGE ITALIAN EXPORTS.

5. BENVENUTO ACCUSED ITALY'S ORGANIZED LABOR MOVEMENT OF PROVINCIALISM -- OF WORRYING ONLY ABOUT THINGS IN ITALY AND IGNORING THE LARGER WORLD PICTURE, WHICH ALSO AFFECTS ITALY. FOR ITALY TO PLAY AN EFFECTIVE ROLE, ITALY MUST INTENSIFY AND CONSOLIDATE RELATIONS WITH AMERICAN LABOR. HE HAD

ENCOURAGED THE AFL-CIO TO REJOIN THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU), AND HAD ASKED THE U.S. TO RETHINK THE ILO QUESTION, "FOR WHICH A REDISCUSSION OF (ILO) STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL FUNCTIONS BECOMES NECESSARY."

6. BENVENUTO PRAISED THE CGIL FOR DECIDING TO LEAVE THE COMMUNIST-DOMINATED WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS (WFTU), IN FAVOR OF MORE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN WESTERN EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ETUC). HE ALSO COMMENDED THE FRENCH CGT FOR BEGINNING TO MOVE IN A SIMILAR DIRECTION, AND VOICED SUPPORT FOR CGT ENTRY INTO THE ETUC. HE SPOKE OF THE NEED TO REDOUBLE ITALIAN EFFORTS IN ETUC, DESPITE THE LATTER'S INEFFECTIVENESS, ESPECIALLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THROUGH MORE ACTIVE UNITARY (I.E. CGIL-CISL-UIL) PARTICIPATION IN AND STRENGTHENING OF THE EUROPEAN TRADE SECRETARIATS. JUST BECAUSE THE CGIL WAS LEAVING WFTU DID NOT MEAN, HE UNDERLINED, THAT UIL AND CISL SHOULD NOW LEAVE THE ICFTU. ITALY SHOULD NOT, HE INSISTED, LAUNCH THE UTOPIAN IDEA OF REBUILDING THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR MOVEMENT AROUND ITALY'S UNITARY EXPERIENCE (A CURIOUS THOUGHT, SINCE NO ONE, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, HAD PROPOSED THIS). INSTEAD, UIL AND CISL SHOULD BE PRAGMATIC AND REDOUBLE THEIR EFFORTS WITHIN THE ICFTU, OF WHICH THE EUROPEAN UNIONS CONSTITUTE ABOUT 65 PERCENT, AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE SECRETARIATS, (ITS'S WHERE THE NITTY-GRITTY OF

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION WORK IS DONE, TO COUNTER THE LINE OF THE MULTI-NATIONALS. RETURNING TO PROTECTIONISM IN AMERICA, BENVENUTO RECOUNTED HOW ALL TV'S AND TV PARTS SOLD IN THE U.S. ARE NOW MADE IN ASIA, AND EVEN AMERICAN SOUVENIRS ARE MADE IN HONG KONG, SO AMERICAN LABOR'S NEED TO FIGHT TO PRESERVE AMERICAN JOBS IS CLEAR, BUT HE URGED INTERNATIONAL LABOR SOLIDARITY TO RAISE WAGES IN TAIWAN AND HONG KONG RATHER THAN PROTECTIONISM.

7. TURNING TO HIS SECOND OBJECTIVE, BENVENUTO ATTRIBUTED AMERICAN RELUCTANCE TO INVEST IN NEW ENTERPRISE IN ITALY TO WHAT HE TERMED MISCONCEPTIONS PREVALENT THAT ITALIAN UNIONS ARE UNWILLING TO COMMIT THEMSELVES SERIOUSLY TO HELP ITALY
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OUT OF ITS CRISIS. HE HAD TRIED TO SET AMERICAN INVESTORS STRAIGHT AS TO THE REAL SITUATION IN ITALY AS FAR AS PRODUCTIVITY, LABOR MOBILITY, STRIKES AND ABSENTEEISM, AND AS TO WHAT HE TERMED THE NEW CONDITIONS WHICH MAKE INVESTMENT PROMISING IN SOUTH ITALY. HE SUGGESTED THAT THE DISTORTION OF INFORMATION ABOUT ITALY IN THE U.S. IS SO GRAVE THAT THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT MUST WANT IT THAT WAY. IN THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION, HOWEVER, HE ATTRIBUTED ITALIAN LABOR'S NEGATIVE PRESS AND IMAGE IN THE U.S. MORE TO LACK OF INTEREST AND EFFORT BY ITALIAN LABOR. UIL, HE ANNOUNCED, WILL INITIATE A BULLETIN IN ENGLISH TO REMEDY THIS SITUATION, AND WILL TRY TO IMPROVE CONTACTS WITH RESIDENT U.S. CORRESPONDENTS IN ROME.

8. BENVENUTO EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS MEETING WITH THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN NEW YORK. HE SHOWED THEM ITALY WAS NO LONGER A CREDIT RISK AND ASKED THAT THE "SPECIAL MENTION:" BE WITHDRAWN, HE SAID, AND THEY HAD AGREED TO HOLD A PUBLIC DIALOGUE SOON IN THE U.S. ON PROSPECTS IN ITALY FOR AMERICAN INVESTORS, SIMILAR TO THAT TO BE HELD IN ROME THIS MONTH. END UNCLASSIFIED.

BEGIN LOU. (A CHAMBER MEMBER REPORTEDLY EMBARRASSED BENVENUTO AND GROUP BY ASKING THAT A CGIL REPRESENTATIVE COME WITH BENVENUTO TO N.Y. TO EXPLAIN ITALIAN LABOR'S STANCE. AS A LEADER OF THE CGIL-CISL-UIL FEDERATION (CCU) IN ITALY, BENVENUTO COULD ONLY AGREE, PUBLICLY, TO THIS SUGGESTION, BUT THE LAST THING BENVENUTO WANTS IS TO SPONSOR -- AND BE OVERSHADOWED BY -- A CGIL VISIT TO THE U.S., WHICH HE REALIZES WOULD WIPE OUT ANY RAPPORT HE HOPES TO ESTABLISH WITH THE AFL-CIO.)
END LOU. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED.

9. BENVENUTO AND RAVECCA ANNOUNCED THAT UIL WILL ACT TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SUPPORT CZECH WORKERS WHO HAVE LOST JOBS FOR POLITICAL REASONS AND SEND EACH A SYMBOLIC SUM EACH MONTH. THEY ALSO ANNOUNCED 2 UIL ROUND TABLES--ONE IN ROME NOVEMBER 25-26 ON EUROPE, FEATURING SOCIALIST ITALIAN EEC COMMISSIONER ANTONIO GIOLITTI, AND ONE IN VENICE DECEMBER 5-6, CO-SPONSORED BY GEORGETOWN U. AND THE VENICE BIENNALE, ON "HUMAN RIGHTS, EAST AND WEST."

10. BIGGER NEWS THAT DAY RELEGATED BENVENUTO'S PRESS CONFERENCE TO BACK PAGES, WITH WIDESPREAD BUT RATHER SKETCH COVERAGE. ROME'S BIGGEST CIRCULATION DAILY, THE LEFTIST, ANTI-AMERICAN IL MESSAGGERO, GAVE IT FAIRLY PROMINENT COVERAGE, BUT MESSAGGERO'S SOCIALIST LABOR REPORTER SERGIO TURONE DISTORTED BENVENUTO'S MESSAGE BADLY. HE PREFACED IT WITH A DIATRIBE OF HIS OWN AGAINST THE AFL-CIO, WHICH, HE SAID ENJOYS DESERVED ILL-REPUTE IN EUROPE'S DEMOCRATIC OPINION FOR SPONSORING "REACTIONARY INTERNATIONAL INTERFERENCE" AND "USING "MCCARTHYIST CRITERIA" TO SELECT ITS "INTERLOCUTORS", BEGINNING WHEN IT "FAVORED" THE 1948 CGIL SPLIT AND CONTINUING THROUGH "RECENT ATTEMPTS TO BUTTRESS ITALIAN LABOR'S CONSERVATIVE FRINGE GROUPS AGAINST ITALIAN LABOR UNITY." AFTER ASKING RHETORICALLY WHETHER AMERICAN LABOR MUST REALLY BE GIVEN UP AS LOST FOR THE DEMOCRATIC CAUSE, TURONE EXPLAINED THAT BENVENUTO HAD TRIED TO PUT US-ITALIAN TRADE UNION RELATIONS ON A NEW, "CLEAN" BASIS, AND THEN WENT ON TO QUOTE FROM BENVENUTO'S PRINTED SUMMARY OF HIS REMARKS. END UNCLASSIFIED. BGIN LOU. (TURONE LEFT AS THE PRESS CONFERENCE WAS JUST GETTING UNDERWAY. UNFORTUNATELY, HIS VERSION MAY HAVE THE MOST IMPACT*).

12. COMMENT: ONE REASON FOR BENVENUTO'S HASTY PRESS CONFERENCE MAY BE THAT UIL REPUBLICAN MINORITY LEADER RAFFAELE VANNI, OUSTED BY BENVENUTO AS UIL SECRETARY GENERAL JUST OVER A YEAR AGO, IS ABOUT TO TRAVEL TO NEW YORK FOR THE CONVENTION OF THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN LABOR COUNCIL, AND HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN TELLING REPORTERS THAT HE WILL HAVE TO REPAIR THE MESS BENVENUTO MADE DURING HIS TRIP AND BENVENUTO'S EARLIER "DISINVITATION" OF THE AFL-CIO'S IRVING BROWN FROM ATTENDING.
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ING UIL'S CONVENTION LAST JUNE. BENVENUTO VISITED THE COUNCIL WHILE IN NEW YORK LAST WEEK. ACCORDING TO ONE OF BENVENUTO'S TRAVELLING COMPANIONS, THEY DISCOVERED TO THEIR EMBARRASSMENT THAT UIL HAD ALSO FORGOTTEN TO SEND THE COUNCIL ITS TRADITIONAL INVITATION TO UIL'S JUNE CONVENTION. THEY AND THE COUNCIL AGREED HENCEFORTH TO EXCHANGE CONVENTION INVITATIONS ORGANIZATION-TO ORGANIZATION, BUT THEY WERE UNAWARE, UNTIL THEIR RETURN THAT THE COUNCIL'S CONVENTION IS ABOUT TO BEGIN AND THAT ONLY VANNI WAS INVITED THIS YEAR (SOMEHOW THIS HAD NOT COME UP IN THEIR CONVERSATION). AFTER SOME HASTY TELEPHONE CALLS TO NEW YORK, IT WAS AGREED THAT RAVECCA, BENVENUTO'S LEADING SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC SUPPORTER AND DE FACTO NUMBER TWO MAN IN UIL, WOULD ATTEND THE COUNCIL'S CONVENTION THIS WEEK ON BEHALF OF UIL. AS AN OLD SOCIAL DEMOCRAT WHO CLAIMS MANY FRIENDS IN NEW YORK, HE MAY BE ABLE TO DO MORE THAN BENVENUTO TO IMPROVE UIL'S STRAINED RELATIONS WITH AMERICAN LABOR. GARDNER

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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
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Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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Reference: 77 ROME 17576
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
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Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 601213
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ITALIAN LABOR LEADER BENVENUTO HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER VISIT TO US.
TAGS: ELAB, IT, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/ace1f31a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009